APPARATUS CLAIMS:

1.   An apparatus facilitating the placing conferenced multiple outbound telephone calls, comprising:

   a.   an internet-connected computer for receiving dialing information over the internet;

   b.   an outbound call engine capable for placing a plurality of outbound telephone calls, said call engine responsive to said dialing information;

   c.   call conferencing means capable of connecting a plurality of outbound telephone calls together.

   d.   a database comprising times when customers have specified they are willing to receive calls.

2.   The apparatus of claim 1, wherein said internet connected computer comprises a web server.

3.   The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said call conferencing means connect said plurality of outbound calls together through third on premises telephony equipment.

4.   The apparatus of claim 1, further comprising a telephone carrier digital network command interface, and where said call conferencing means connect said plurality of outbound calls together by issuing commands through said command interface to a telephone network switch to disconnect said calls from said call engine and maintain a connection between said calls in said telephone network switch

5.   The apparatus of claim 1, further comprising a database for storing customer information.

6.   The apparatus of claim 1, wherein:
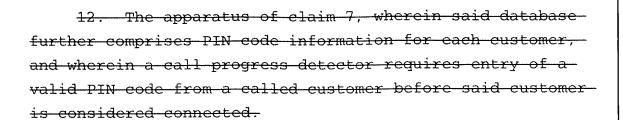
a.   ~~said call engine incorporates call progress detection means capable of detecting a connected call;~~

b.   ~~said dialing information uniquely identifies a first customer and at least one second customer;~~

c.   ~~and wherein said call engine automatically dials said second customers immediately subsequent to successfully connecting to said first customer, but only if the call to said call initiating customer connected.~~

7.   The apparatus of claim ~~5~~1, wherein said database further comprises enabled-caller criteria identifying for each customer which other customers are enabled to call, and said call engine will only place calls to connect customers when said enabled-caller criteria is met.

8.   The apparatus of claim 7, wherein said enabled caller information further comprises for each customer allowed contact time windows during which calls will be accepted from other customers, further comprising means to automatically notify a customer by e-mail when an enabled caller's last allowed contact time windows have expired.

9.   The apparatus of claim 1~~7~~, wherein customers from whom calls will be accepted can be defined as a group.

10.   The apparatus of claim 9, wherein said dialing information for a customer calling as a member of a group includes both group-identifying information and individual-customer-identifying information.

11.   The apparatus of claim 10, wherein said call-acceptance criteria further comprises call-blocking information specifying for each customer any individual customers from whom calls will not be accepted.

~~12. The apparatus of claim 7, wherein said database further comprises PIN-code information for each customer, and wherein a call progress detector requires entry of a valid PIN-code from a called customer before said customer is considered connected.~~

13.   The apparatus of claim 7, further comprising call-acceptance criteria specifying which customers can call a given customer and which criteria are modifiable via a website by said given customer.

~~14. The apparatus of claim 5, further comprising means for timing telephone connection time.~~

15.   The apparatus of claim 14, further comprising means for calculating charges based on telephone connection time, and wherein said database further comprises past charges accrued for each customer and billability status for customers, indicating whether each customer is billable for calls they set up, and whether they are billable for calls others set up to them, wherein billability status for each customer with respect to each other customer may be individually defined.~~~~

~~16. The apparatus of claim 15, wherein said billability status further comprises whether each customer is willing to accept split-charge billing.~~

~~17. The apparatus of claim 15, wherein billability status for each customer with respect to each other customer may be individually defined.~~

~~18. The apparatus of claim 14, further comprising means for automatically providing an audio call length reminder on a call a predetermined length of time after said call begins, and wherein said database further comprises call length reminder information.~~

~~19. The apparatus of claim 18, further comprising means for ending a call automatically a predetermined time after it begins.~~

~~20. The apparatus of claim 6, further comprising means of making said second customer's phone number look busy to any calls being placed through said call engine to said second number while said first number is being called and said second number has not been called yet.~~

~~21. The apparatus of claim 4, further comprising means for determining whether a line is busy through a query submitted through said telephone carrier digital network command interface.~~

22.   The apparatus of claim 7~~12~~, wherein said database further comprises call scheduling information, and conferenced outbound telephone calls may be scheduled in advance and placed at pre-determined times, and call schedule data for a given customer may be accessed and modified by that customer via a website.

23.   The apparatus of claim 7, further comprising means for playing to a call recipient at the beginning of a call an audio announcement identifying the other party to said call, and <u>means for including in said audio announcement information about the last time said other party placed a conferenced outbound call between himself and said recipient</u>~~means for accepting an audio command disabling call acceptance from said other party prior to connecting said other party to the call~~.

~~24. The apparatus of claim 23, further comprising means for including in said audio announcement information about the last time said other party placed a conferenced outbound call between himself and said recipient.~~

25. The apparatus of claim 7, further comprising means for playing to a call recipient at the beginning of a call an audio greeting in said call recipient's own voice.

26. The apparatus of claim 7, wherein for each customer said database further comprises digital audio greetings recorded by said customer and data associations between particular audio greetings and particular other call recipients to whom said customer might set up calls, and further comprising means to play the appropriate associated greeting each time a call is set up by said customer to a call recipient for whom said customer has recorded and designated an associated audio greeting.

27. The apparatus of claim 11, further comprising automatic means for sending an e-mail notification to a customer if someone said customer has designated as blocked tries to set up a call to said customer.

28. The apparatus of claim 8, further comprising means to automatically notify a customer by e-mail when an enabled caller's last allowed contact time windows have expired.

29. The apparatus of claim 1, further comprising a web-based dialing directory with clickable representations of numbers to be dialed.

30. The apparatus of claim 7, further comprising means for encrypting membership numbers of other members as seen by a given member, based on the given member's own member number, and wherein customers are identified to each other through said database by uniquely encrypted member numbers.

31. The apparatus of claim 16, further comprising privacy-protected mail means for leaving a private message for an intended call recipient if an intended recipient is not reachable, said voice mail being retrievable only by the

intended recipient through the use of private member-
identification information.

32.   The apparatus of claim 31, further comprising
inbound call receiving means allowing retrieval of privacy-
protected voice mail by dialing a number and entering member
identification information.

33.   The apparatus of claim 7, further comprising means
allowing any member to automatically generate a temporary
membership number for a prospective member, and means to
automatically generate a permanent membership for that
prospective member when that prospective member uses said
temporary membership number to become a member, and
automatically replace occurrences of said temporary
membership number in said database with member numbers
uniquely related to said permanent member number.

34.   The apparatus of claim 1, further comprising means
for serving a web page indicative of call placement
progress.

35.   The apparatus of claim 34, further comprising
means to serve a web page allowing call placement options of
an intended call does not go through.

36.   The apparatus of claim 35, further comprising
means for periodically checking a busy line, and setting up
a call when said line stops being busy.

37.   The apparatus of claim 36, further comprising
timing means to stop the checking of the busy line after a
customer-specified amount of time.

38.   The apparatus of claim 7, wherein said database
further comprises for each customer phone numbers at which
said customer can be contacted, and further comprising web-
based sign-up and account access means, and automated

outbound call placement during sign-up, wherein said
outbound calls are placed to all contact numbers specified
for the person signing up, and proper PIN code entry is
required during said automated calls during sign-up in order
to validate phone numbers to be called to reach said person.

~~39. The apparatus of claim 38, further comprising web~~
~~based sign-up and account access means, and automated~~
~~outbound call placement during sign-up, wherein said~~
~~outbound calls are placed to all contact numbers specified~~
~~for the person signing up, and proper PIN code entry is~~
~~required during said automated calls during sign-up in order~~
~~to validate phone numbers to be called to reach said person.~~

40.   The apparatus of claim 7, wherein said database
further comprises information for each customer indicating
at what phone numbers said customer can be dialed.

41.   The apparatus of claim 40, wherein said database
further comprises for each customer said customer's
preferences as to what phone said customer is allowed to be
called at and at what times.

42.   The apparatus of claim 7~~41~~, wherein said database
further comprises for each customer what phone numbers said
customer is reachable at by any particular other customer.

43.   The apparatus of claim 7, wherein said database
further comprises for each customer past call information
including time of each call and member number of calling or
called party, and further comprising means for serving up
such past call information as web page data.

44.   The apparatus of claim 43, further comprising
means for disabling or enabling callers in response to web
click data received from a browser viewing said past call
information.

~~45.   The apparatus of claim 5, further comprising electronic billing means for periodically billing customers for accrued charges.~~

46.   The apparatus of claim ~~46~~1, wherein said database further comprises for each customer professional services rate information, and further comprising means to charge customers for professional service time of a called party in addition to connection charges.

47.   The apparatus of claim 46, further comprising means for serving up web-based schedule information for professional service providers, allowing web-based sign-up for paid telephone time with professional service providers.

48.   The apparatus of claim 23, further comprising means for a called party to initiate automatic delivery of a pre-recorded audio message to a caller prior to and in place of connecting said caller to said called party.
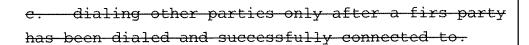
METHOD CLAIMS

49.   A method of doing business comprising auctioning professional service time on the web.

50.   A method of fund-raising comprising auctioning teleconference time with celebrities on the web, automatically calling high bidders and connecting them to said teleconference, and automatically billing teleconference participants the amounts they bid to be on said teleconference.

51.   A method for placing conferenced multiple outbound telephone calls, comprising:

a. RAn receiving dialing information over the internet;

b. checking within a database allowed contact time window criteria set up by a call-receiving party regarding a call-initiating party;

cb. placing a plurality of outbound telephone calls in response to said dialing information if a call time falls within said allowed contact time window criteria;

de. connecting said multiple outbound calls together as a conference call.

~~52. The method of claim 51, further comprising serving up a web page of account information and calling options in response to web packets containing URL and cookie information.~~

53. The method of claim 51 wherein said conferencing connection is done ~~through on premises telephony equipment~~external to a telephone company switch.

54. The method of claim 51 wherein the connecting of said outbound calls further comprises sending digital network commands to a telephone carrier switch to offload and maintain the connection.

~~55. The method of claim 51, further comprising storing customer information in a database.~~

~~56. The method of claim 51, wherein:~~

~~a. Monitoring call progress to detect connection to called parties;~~

~~b. dialing at least two customers based on said dialing information;~~

e.   dialing other parties only after a firs party
has been dialed and successfully connected to.

57.   The method of claim 55, wherein a call between a
call-initiating party and a call-receiving party is only set
up only if information in said database indicates that said
call-initiating party is allowed to contact a call-receiving
party.

58.   The method of claim 57, further comprising
checking allowed contact time window criteria in said
database set up by said call-receiving party regarding said
call-initiating party, and only placing said conferenced
outbound calls if said call-time falls within said allowed
contact time criteria.

59.   The method of claim 51̶7̶, further comprising
checking allowed group contact criteria if said dialing
information indicates that said call-initiating party is
initiating said call as a member of a call-enabled group,
and placing said call only if said group is currently
contact-enabled by said call-receiving party.

60.   The method of claim 59, wherein said calling
information is indicative of both individual information and
group information.

61.   The method of claim 60, wherein said group must be
currently enabled and said individual must not be currently
disabled for said call-receiving party within said database
in order for said conferenced calls to be placed.

62.   The method of claim 57, further comprising
automatically prompting called parties for PIN code
information and checking PIN code information entered by
call-initiating and call-receiving parties on the telephone
at the beginnings of their respectively received outbound
calls against PIN code information stored for said customers

~~in said database, and considering said outbound calls connected only if proper PIN code information is entered.~~

63.   The method of claim 57, further comprising serving up customer information as a web page, and accepting customer modification of customer call setup and call-receiving parameters via the internet.

~~64.   The method of claim 55, further comprising timing connected telephone calls and storing call durations in said database.~~

~~65.   The method of claim 64, further comprising calculating call charges based on connection time, connection rates, and customer billability status.~~

66.   The method of claim ~~65~~51, wherein <u>said database further comprises billability status, and where</u> billability status may include fully billable status, split-billing status, or non-billable status<u>, and wherein the billability status of each customer may be individually defined with respect to every other customer.</u>.

67.   <u>A method of placing an international telephone call between a calling party and a called party, comprising initiating outbound telephone calls to said called party and said calling party through an internet-based interface, and connecting said outbound calls together after both said parties answer said outbound calls.</u>~~The method of claim 65, wherein the billability status of each customer may be individually defined with respect to every other customer.~~

68.   <u>The method of claim 67, wherein said calling party is in a first country, and said called party is in a second country, and said outbound telephone calls originate from a third country.</u>~~The method of claim 64, further comprising providing an audio call length reminder a predetermined time after the beginning of a conferenced multiple outbound call.~~

69.   The method of claim 68, further comprising automatically ending a conferenced call a predetermined time after it begins.

70.   The method of claim 68, further comprising making the call-receiving party's phone look busy to other callers using the present invention when the call-initiating party is being called to be connected to the call-receiving party.

71. The method of claim 54, further comprising determining whether a line is busy through a digital query submitted through a telephone carrier digital network command interface.A method for placing long-distance telephone calls at optimized rates, comprising supplying a calling party's number and a called party's number through a website, selecting a telecommunications provider to connect said called party and said calling party based on rate information, placing outbound calls to said called party and said calling party, and connecting said called party to said calling party after both said parties answer said outbound calls.

72.   The method of claim 51̶2̶, further comprising automatically making conferenced outbound calls at times scheduled in advance in said database.

73.   The method of claim 51̶7̶, further comprising automatically playing to said call-receiving party at the beginning of a call an audio announcement identifying the other party to said call, and allowing said call recipient to cancel said call without deliver an audio message to said calling party without being connected to said calling party.

74.   The method of claim 73, further comprising automatically playing to said call-receiving party at the beginning of a call audio information about the time the call-initiating party last called.

75. The method of claim 51~~7~~, further comprising playing to the call-receiving party at the beginning of a call an audio greeting in the call-receiving party's own voice.

~~76. The method of claim 57, further comprising playing to the call-receiving party at the beginning of a call a greeting in the voice of the call-initiating party, identifying the call-initiating party.~~